

SCREAMING STUDENT



The Power and Magic of Adolescence

VS. The Insufferable

Tedium
of
School



Gratefully pirated from

Grace Llewellyn's

THE
TEENAGE
LIBERATION
HANDBOOK

How to Quit School
and
Get a Real Life
and Education



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Youth is the time to go flashing from one end of the world to the other both in mind and body; to try the manners of different nations; to hear the chimes at midnight; to see sunrise in town and country; to be converted at a revival; to circumnavigate the metaphysics, write halting verses, run a mile to see a fire, and wait all day long in the theatre to applaud 'Hernani.'

--Robert Louis Stevenson, *Crabbed Age and Youth*.

If you ever read any anthropology, one of the first things you notice is that primal cultures simmer up all of their mystery and magic and power and ask their teenagers to drink deeply.

A sixteen-year-old Dakota boy fasts until an empowering vision overtakes him. A newly-menstruating Apache girl becomes the goddess White Painted Woman in an intense, joyful theatrical ritual which lasts four days. All over the planet, traditional cultures provide various ritual experiences to adolescents, bringing them into contact with the deepest parts of themselves and their heritage.

There is danger and pain, as well as beauty and exultation, in some of these traditional ways of initiating people into adulthood. I don't want to make any shallow statement that we've got it all wrong because we don't ask pubescent boys to endure three days of biting wasps.

But I would like you to reflect for a minute on the contrast between the way *our* society initiates its young and the vivid undertakings of the primal world.

What do you get instead of vision? You get school--and all of the blind passivity and grey monotone it trains into you.

For an institution to ask you, during some of your most magical years, to sit still and be good and read quietly for six or more hours each day is barely even thinkable, let alone tolerable. How do you feel when the sun comes out in March and makes the most golden day imaginable, but you have to stay in and clean your room?

In case you've lost touch with your burgeoning beauty, let me remind you that that's exactly what's going on, for at least six years of your teenaged schooling. Adolescence is a time of dreaming, adventure, risk, sweet wildness, and intensity. It's the time for you to "find yourself," or at least go looking. The sun is rising on your life. Your body is breaking out of its cocoon and ready to try wings. But you have to stay in--for *such* a long time--and keep your pencils sharpened. School is bad for your spirit, except the pep club kind.

It's no accident, I'm sure. The way our society is set up now, something's got to prevent visionary experience. Otherwise, ninety percent of the American monoculture would shatter. People who are fully and permanently awakened to the wildness and beauty in and around them make

A healthy adult society would acknowledge the beauty of youth, make up some good poems about it, and then not think about it too much. There are certainly more productive activities in life than fixating on the rosy cheeks you'll never have again. But since we do not have a healthy adult society, we get all bent out of shape over it, create a cult of young-beautiful-people-in-magazines, and punish real live teenagers by telling them they are ugly.


Just in case you do figure out that you are beautiful, we make sure that you can't appreciate it, by telling you that you are confused and overly emotional during these traumatic years and for pete's sake don't go and make any decisions for yourself, and don't let loose and have any free wild experiences with life. Dogs in mangers, we turn the power of adolescence into a weak disease. Teachers sit in the teachers' lounge and laugh about you behind your backs.

Isn't he cute, they say. Poor Kristy, with no idea of how she sticks out in that magenta skirt. This, from people who are overweight, in ruts, out of touch with their dreams, insecure, and otherwise at least as imperfect as the subjects of their conversation. Thank god I'm not that age any more, says Mrs. Wallace, leaning her double chin over her desk. We read tacky cute articles in *Family Circle* called "How to Survive the Terrible Teens: An Owner's Guide." The owner being the parent, of course. *School*, yes, is something to survive, but being a teenager is something that flies.

We force you to act younger than you are, legally withholding your ability to control your own life. The *World Book* encyclopedia says, "Most teenagers mature psychologically at the rate set by their society. As a result, psychological adolescence normally lasts at least as long as the period of legal dependence." Certainly, there is no *biological* limitation to teenage independence. In other times and places, teenagers have commonly married, raised children, held jobs, operated businesses, and occasionally ruled countries.

It seems you're talking about more than just schools here. Aren't you getting off the point a bit?

Yes, school is not the only bad guy in the war against whole adolescence. But it is our culture's deathly substitute for powerful growing experiences. It is the way we take your time so you don't explore your own inklings of truth. It is the place where you learn to be passive instead of active. Quitting school isn't going to guarantee you a healthy, passionate adolescence, but at least it will remove the biggest obstacle against that flowering.



your eyes see, that in the world from which I get my visions. I tell you this is the real world, not the Green Frog Skin World. That's only a bad dream, a streamlined, smog-filled nightmare.

Because we refuse to step out of our reality into this frog-skin illusion, we are called dumb, lazy, improvident, immature, other-worldly. It makes me happy to be called "other-worldly," and it should make you so. It's a good thing our reality is different from theirs.*

Furthermore...

Schools--and this society they represent--go beyond blocking your visionary tendencies. They further cripple you by making fun of you, as if you were not quite human, the new niggers. Why? Probably because every hierarchical society seems to need niggers to put down, and women and African-Americans won't take it anymore. When someone puts *you* down, you want to put somebody else down.

(Dr. Seuss, reliable social commentator, wrote a story called "King Looie Katz." King Looie Katz makes Fooie Katz carry his long proud royal tail around. So Fooie Katz sticks his own nose in the air and makes another cat haul *his* tail. Pretty soon all the cats in Katzenstein are walking around carrying the tail of the cat in front of them...except the very last little cat, who doesn't have anyone to carry his.

That little cat, who is a bit like you, takes action. He yells "I Quit" and slams down the tail in his paws. Everybody else follows suit. The story concludes:

And since that day in Katzen-stein,
All cats have been more grown-up.
They're all more demo-catic
Because each cat holds his own up.***

Food for thought.)

Another reason adults make fun of you is that they're jealous. Teenagers are beautiful and fresh; the perfume of a flower is concentrated in the bud. Yes, many teenagers are awkward, pimpled, or strangely tall and thin. Far more adults, however, are awkward (having forgotten how to use their bodies), sallow-skinned (too much sitting in air-conditioned offices) and predictably heavy (not enough skateboarding).

lousy wage-slaves. On the other hand, people who are *not* distracted by a wellspring of spiritual and sexual yearnings can assemble clock radios or automobiles very quickly.

More importantly, unawakened people are less likely to *question* the things in our society which are horrifically dull and ridiculous. The point of seeking any kind of visionary experience is to *see*. When vision comes to you, eternity is its black velvet backdrop. Everything else comes out on the stage to sing and dance. Some of it fits in with the grandeur of that backdrop, and some of it only clashes, looking ugly and cheap. You end up wanting to adjust your life so that it's full of stuff that fits in with eternity, and not crammed with things that don't matter.

Therefore, one reason many primal cultures can confidently guide their young toward visionary experiences is that they're not worried. They don't have to worry that the visions will show anything horrible about the society itself. If there *is* something going wrong with the cultural state of affairs, they want to know, so they can fix it.

In this culture the opposite is true. When you have a messy house, you don't offer a magnifying glass to your guests. You probably don't even open the curtains and let the light in.

If we did teenaged visions, democracy would get a boost, but the powers of Mass Production and Rat Racing Consumerism would take a dive. We would see that far too much of what we accept as "reality" is a blasphemy against true reality. Since our consumptive culture is out of balance with the rest of the universe, it would look mighty bad under the inspection of visionary young people. Get it? The US of A does not invite its young to seek visions, because those visions would force a Big Change.

No force of dullness and ignorance is strong enough, however, to stop you from seeking. Eternity, God, Goddess, whatever you call it--is too strong. It will get in, though it has to battle school and other strongholds of society. Writers and artists bring us some inklings, though when school introduces us to them, it nearly destroys their potency.



The Big Mystery creeps in through all your fascinations with the unknown--music with heavy pulses and strange lyrics, sexual fantasies and experiences, the occult, drugs (including alcohol). Obviously, some of these things can be taken to unhealthy excess. Drug abuse is a disease. Drug use, however, is often the sign of someone's intense spiritual quest. Hallucinogens can be an easy, though risky, way to tap into visionary experience. There are other ways, healthier though more difficult--through trance and fasting, for instance.

Unfortunately, most adults refuse to acknowledge the powerful impulse behind any of these activities, labeling them as "bad," as if that would make them go away. Why? Their own visionary tendencies got cancelled out by society at sweet sixteen. Misery, as they say, loves company. It is *incredibly* painful for an emotional cripple to be around someone who is emotionally free. And so most adults would rather pretend desperately to visionary teenagers that the world is nothing more than green lawns, white socks, and recently sanitized carpets.

Visionary tendencies come in dark and light, or a combination thereof.

Some teenagers want dark experiences. They walk in cemeteries at night. They write stories about suicide; they obsess on black clothing and Pink Floyd lyrics. None of it means they are "bad" or twisted. When they are finished playing with the dark, they will understand the light much better. If they are ignored or ridiculed, maybe they will do something drastic, but their search is usually only an earnest attempt to understand the depths.

Others gravitate toward the light--daytime psychedelic colors, long solitary hikes. They determine to become a dancer or artist instead of something "realistic." If their family is sedately Catholic, maybe they go to the Assembly of God and speak in tongues. If their family goes to the Assembly of God, maybe they climb a hill and offer flowers to Apollo.

Schools--and many parents--lie a lot at this point, telling you you're out of touch with reality. The truth is, you're out of touch with the expectations and patterns of an *unreal*, man-made industrial society. You are *in* touch with the reality that counts. Look at the milky way some night and think about it. You'll know. In *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, a Sioux Medicine man talks about the reality of "the white world" versus the deeper reality of artists and Indians:

Artists are the Indians of the white world. They are called dreamers who live in the clouds, improvident people who can't hold onto their money, people who don't want to face "reality." They say the same things about Indians. How the hell do these frog-skin* people know what reality is? The world in which you paint a picture in your mind, a picture which shows things different from what

